

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 SSO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
NSCE-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 SSM-03 NEAE-00 /076 W
-----105746 041752Z /66

O R 041512Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2370
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN NY
USMISSION SINAI

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IS, EG
SUBJECT: WEIZMAN'S CAIRO VISIT: MIXED REVIEWS

SUMMARY: NO CONSENSUAL ASSESSMENT OF WEIZMAN'S TRIP TO EGYPT IS REFLECTED IN PRESS REPORTS AND COMMENTARY. DISCONNECTED POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE COMMENTS RELATING TO THE TRIP INCLUDE: STRESS ON THE CONTINUING IMPORTANCE OF DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS; THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE TALKS RESULTED IN PROGRESS AND ARE EVIDENCE THAT A SETTLEMENT WITH EGYPT IS POSSIBLE; THE FAILURE OF THE TRIP TO LEAD TO THE RECONVENING OF THE COMMITTEES; AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EGYPTIAN COMMITMENT TO A COMPROMISE PEACE. LACK OF AGREEMENT ON TRIP'S RESULTS MAY BE RELATED TO CONTRADICTORY ASSESSMENTS OF SADAT'S INTENTIONS WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT. WEIZMAN, UNDER ATTACK WITHIN HERUT,
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IS IN PARADOXICAL POSITION. END SUMMARY

1. DESPITE THREE DAYS WITH WHICH TO ASSESS THE WEIZMAN VISIT, PRESS COMMENTATORS ARE UNSURE OF HOW TO EVALUATE RESULTS OF DEFENSE MINISTER'S MISSION. WHILE HOPEFUL EXPECTANCY THAT SURROUNDED WEIZMAN'S DEPARTURE HAS DISSIPATED, THERE IS BROAD AGREEMENT THAT

THE TRIP WAS NEITHER TERRIBLY DESTRUCTIVE TO PEACE
HOPES NOR A SIGNIFICANT BREAKTHROUGH.

2. UPBEAT COMMENTARY EMPHASIZES THE SIGNIFICANCE OF
WEIZMAN'S MERE PRESENCE IN CAIRO AT THIS TIME AND
SADAT'S AGREEMENT TO ANOTHER VISIT IN THE NEAR FUTURE.
EVEN IF WEIZMAN ACHIEVED NOTHING MORE THAN KEEPING THE
AVENUE OF DIRECT TALKS OPEN, THIS IN ITSELF IS IMPORTANT,
ESPECIALLY SINCE THE ALTERNATIVE IS BECOMING LESS
ATTRACTIVE AS U.S. SUITABILITY FOR THE ROLE OF MEDIATOR DECLINES.
IN THIS CONNECTION SADAT'S DECLARATION IN HIS LATEST
OCTOBER INTERVIEW THAT DIRECT CONTACT BETWEEN ISRAEL
AND EGYPT IS NOW A PERMANENT FIXTURE OF THE MIDDLE EAST
SCENE IS STRESSED IN SOME STORIES. SOME REPORTS QUOTE OTHER
SOURCES TO THE EFFECT THAT THE WEIZMAN VISIT CONSIDERABLY
IMPROVED THE NEGOTIATING ATMOSPHERE AND THAT IT MIGHT EVEN
HAVE RESULTED IN SUBSTANTIVE NEGOTIATING PROGRESS. THE
JERUSALEM POST IN THIS VERN REPORTS THAT "SADAT AND
WEIZMAN WERE REPORTED TO HAVE APPROVED A COMPROMISE
ON THE CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES OF ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS
AND AIR BASES."

3. THE MOST OPTIMISTIC ASSESSMENT IS THAT ATTRIBUTED
(IN ALL THE PAPERS) TO WEIZMAN HIMSELF AT VARIOUS
FORUMS WHERE HE IS SAID TO HAVE ASSURED HIS LISTENERS
THAT HIS CAIRO VISIT HAD CONVINCED HIM THAT SETTLEMENT
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WITH EGYPT IS POSSIBLE.

4. THESE PUTATIVE ACHIEVEMENTS ARE OFFSET BY THE FAILURE
OF THE WEIZMAN TRIP TO LEAD TO THE RECONVENING OF THE
POLITICAL AND MILITARY COMMITTEES AND BY THE PERCEPTION
THAT NEITHER SIDE HAS OR IS LIKELY TO COMPROMISE
WITHIN THE OPERATIONAL CONTEXT OF A WEIZMAN SHUTTLE.
IN THE MOST PESSIMISTIC PRESS COMMENTARY, MAARIV'S
HARIF WRITES THAT EGYPT'S REFUSAL TO RECONVENE THE
COMMITTEES MAY INDICATE GOE INSISTENCE ON UNILATERAL
ISRAELI CONCESSIONS PRIOR TO A RENEWAL OF NEGOTIATIONS.
THUS, THE QUESTION OF RECONVENING OF THE COMMITTEES IS
A TEST (AGAIN*) OF EGYPT'S COMMITMENT TO
PEACE BASED ON A NEGOTIATED COMPROMISE. CONTINUING
EGYPTIAN PRESS ATTACKS ON ISRAEL EVEN WHILE WEIZMAN
IS IN CAIRO AS A GUEST OF THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT, RAISES
DOUBTS IN THIS RESPECT, SAYS HARIF.

5. THESE DIFFERING ASSESSMENTS OF THE SUCCESS OF THE WEIZMAN TRIP
ARE RELATED TO AND REFLECTIVE OF CONTRADICTORY EVALUATIONS
OF SADAT'S INTENTIONS AMONG TOP GOVERNMENT MINISTERS,
AS REPORTED BY BENZIMAN IN HAARETZ. WHILE THE

DEFENSE MINISTER "BELIEVES THAT SADAT WANTS A SETTLEMENT WITH ISRAEL AND THAT HIS WILLINGNESS TO RENEW THE DIRECT CONTACT INDICATES POSSIBLE CHANCES OF A SOFTENING IN THE EGYPTIAN POSITION," THE FOREIGN MINISTER BELIEVES THAT SADAT'S PURPOSE IS TO DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE U.S. THE PRIME MINISTER WHILE STILL CONFIDENT THAT SADAT IS BASICALLY INTERESTED IN REACHING A PEACE AGREEMENT, IS DOUBTFUL THAT THE WEIZMAN TALKS WILL PROMPT SADAT TO COMPROMISE.

6. SHORTLY AFTER HIS RETURN WEIZMAN CAME UNDER ATTACK WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY. THE HERUT FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE COMMITTEE DECLARED THAT THERE WAS NO TRUTH TO WEIZMAN'S ADMISSION (IN HIS MAARIV INTERVIEW)
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THAT THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT COULD DO MORE THAN IT HAS IN IN THE PURSUIT OF PEACE. SUCH STATEMENTS, DECLARED THE COMMITTEE, CAN ONLY PROVIDE AMMUNITION TO ISRAEL'S ENEMIES.

7. COMMENT: WEIZMAN IS CLEARLY IN A PARADOXICAL POSITION. UNDER THE GUN WITHIN HERUT, AND POLITICALLY SQUEEZED WITHIN THE CABINET, SHOWN TO BE LESS A POLITICAL THREAT TO BEGIN THAN HAD BEEN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT, WEIZMAN NEVERTHELESS IS SEEN BY MANY AS THE SOLE REMAINING OPENING TO EGYPT AND TO AN EVENTUAL NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT WITH EGYPT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, MINISTERIAL VISITS, PLANNING MEHETJNGS, PEACE TALKS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978TELAV04506
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780145-0635
Format: TEL
From: TEL AVIV
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780493/aaaadawx.tel
Line Count: 149
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: d40d7db6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3075679
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: WEIZMAN'S CAIRO VISIT: MIXED REVIEWS SUMMARY: NO CONSENSUAL ASSESSMENT OF WEIZMAN'S TRIP TO EGYPT IS REFLECTED IN PRESS REPORTS AND COMMENTARY
TAGS: PINT, IS, EG, (WEIZMAN, EZER)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d40d7db6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014